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ABRAHAM LINCOLN ON WATERWAYS

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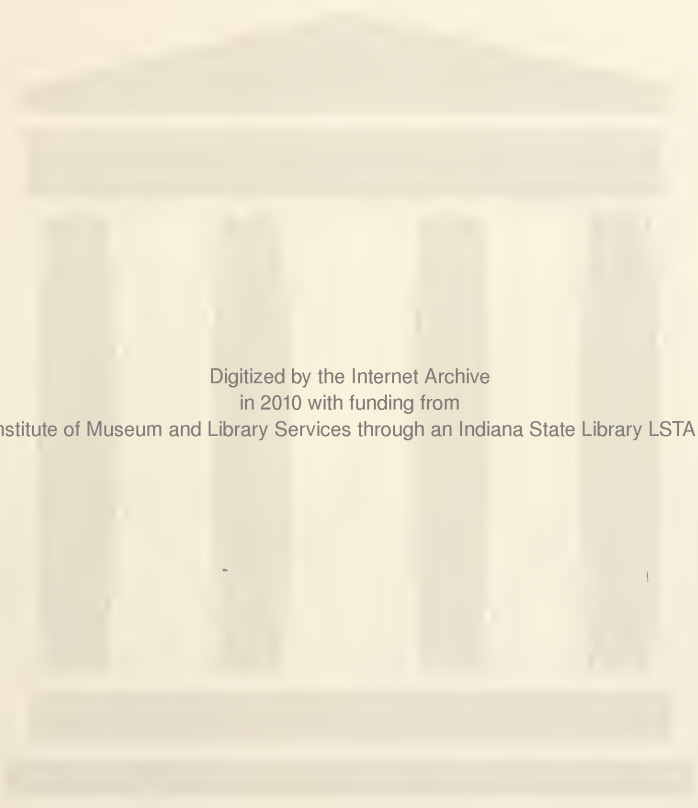
Honorable

Daniel Fish

with the Compliments of

William A. Meese

2/12/1908.

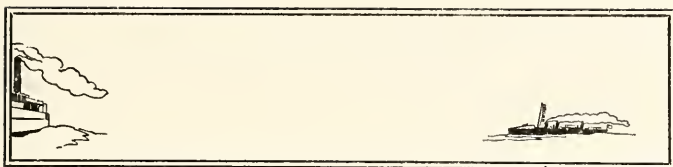


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ABRAHAM LINCOLN



LINCOLN'S BOYHOOD ON THE RIVER.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, a boy of sixteen living near Gentryville, Indiana, on the banks of the Ohio river, was employed for nine months in 1825 by James Taylor as a ferryman to operate a boat which crossed the Ohio river at the mouth of Anderson creek. Lincoln worked as a ferryman and as a boy-of-all-work and earned six dollars a month.

The only modes of travel in those days were by wagon overland, or by boat on our lakes and rivers. The latter, where it could be followed, was the popular way. The Ohio river was thronged with boats.

President Lincoln, one evening at the White House, told the following interesting story of his early experience while a ferryman on the river to Mr. Seward and a few friends. The president said:

"Seward, you never heard, did you, how I earned my first dollar?"

"No," rejoined Mr. Seward.

"Well," continued Mr. Lincoln, "I belonged, you know, to what they called down south the 'scrubs.' We had succeeded in raising, chiefly by my labor, sufficient produce, as I thought, to justify me in taking it down the river to sell.

"After much persuasion I got the consent of mother to go. I constructed a little flatboat, large enough to take a barrel or two of things that we had gathered, with myself and little bundle, down to the southern market. A steamer was coming down the river. We have, you

know, no wharves on the western streams, and the custom was, if passengers were at any of the landings, for them to go out in a boat, the steamer stopping and taking them on board.

"I was contemplating my new flatboat and wondering whether I could make it stronger or improve it in any particular, when two men came down to the shore in carriages, with trunks, and looking at the different boats singled out mine and asked:

" 'Who own this?' I answered, somewhat modestly, 'I do.'

" 'Will you,' said one of them, 'take us and our trunks out to the steamer?'

" 'Certainly,' said I. I was very glad to have the chance of earning something. I supposed that each of them would give me one or two or three bits. The trunks were put on my flatboat, the passengers seated themselves on the trunks and I sculled them out to the steamboat.

" 'They got on board and I lifted up their heavy trunks and put them on deck. The steamer was about to put on steam again, when I called out that they had forgotten to pay me. Each of them took from his pocket a silver half-dollar, and threw it on the floor of my boat. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I picked up the money. Gentlemen, you may think it was a very little thing, and in these days it seems to me a trifle; but it was a most important incident in my life. I could scarcely credit that I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar. The world seemed wider and fairer before me. I was a more hopeful and confident being from that time.'

In March, 1828, when only nineteen years old, Lincoln hired out to Mr. Gentry, the leading citizen of the vicinity, as a "bow hand" and "to work the front oars" on a flatboat going with a cargo of bacon to New Orleans. His wages were eight dollars a month and his passage home. The trip was about 1800 miles in length

and it was Lincoln's first experience away from home. The entire business of the trip was placed in Lincoln's care, and a son of Mr. Gentry was his sole companion.

One night when the flatboat was laid up at a sugar plantation six miles below Baton Rouge and while the boys were asleep, seven negroes attempted to board her intending to commit robbery. Lincoln and young Gentry were awakened. Lincoln seized a hand spike, and as the foremost negro jumped on the boat, knocked him into the water. The second, third and fourth robber as each tried to board the boat was treated in the same way, and then the negroes turned and fled.

Young Gentry and Lincoln pursued the robbers and administered to them a severe beating. In this encounter Lincoln received a wound, the scar of which he bore through life. Arriving at New Orleans, the "load" as well as the flatboat were sold and the young men returned to their homes some time in June.

LINCOLN A BOAT BUILDER.

In 1830, when Lincoln was twenty-one years old, his father moved from Indiana to Illinois, and Lincoln then started out in life for himself.

In the spring of 1831 he superintended and helped to build a flatboat at Kirkpatrick's mill in Sangamon town on the Sangamon river. The boat was built for a Mr. Orfutt and was completed in thirty days. Lincoln was one of the crew that started in the latter part of April with the boat, loaded with corn and pork, for New Orleans. But just before starting he had quite an adventure which was described as follows by an eye witness, John Roll :

"It was the spring following the winter of the deep snow. Walter Carman, John Seamon and myself, and

at times others of the Carman boys, had helped Abe in building the boat, and when we had finished we went to work to make a dugout, or canoe, to be used as a small boat with the flat. We found a suitable log about an eighth of a mile up the river, and with our axes went to work under Lincoln's direction. The river was very high, fairly 'booming.'

"After the dugout was ready to launch, we took it to the edge of the water and made ready to 'let her go,' when Walter Carman and John Seamon jumped in as the boat struck the water, each one anxious to be the first to get a ride. As they shot out from the shore they found they were unable to make any headway against the strong current. Carman had the paddle and Seamon was in the stern of the boat. Lincoln shouted to them to 'head up stream' and 'work back to shore,' but they found themselves powerless against the stream.

"At last they began to pull for the wreck of an old flatboat, the first ever built on the Sangamon, which had sunk and gone to pieces, leaving one of the stanchions sticking above the water. Just as they reached it Seamon made a grab, and caught hold of the stanchion, when the canoe capsized, leaving Seamon clinging to the old timber, and throwing Carman into the stream. It carried him down with the speed of a mill-race. Lincoln raised his voice above the roar of the flood and yelled to Carman to swim for an old tree which stood almost in the channel, which the action of the high water had changed.

"Carman, being a good swimmer, succeeded in catching a branch and pulled himself up out of the water, which was very cold and had almost chilled him to death; and there he sat shivering and chattering in the tree. Lincoln, seeing Carman safe, called out to Seamon to let go the stanchion and swim for the tree. With some hesitation he obeyed and struck out, while Lincoln cheered and directed him from the bank. As Seamon

neared the tree, he made one grab for a branch, and missing it, went under the water. Another desperate lunge was successful, and he climbed up beside Carman. Things were pretty exciting now, for there were two men in the tree and the boat gone.

"It was a cold, raw April day and there was great danger of the men becoming benumbed and falling back into the water. Lincoln called out to them to keep their spirits up and he would save them. The village had been alarmed by this time, and many people had come down to the bank. Lincoln procured a rope and tied it to a log. He called all hands to come and help roll the log into the water, and after this had been done, he with the assistance of several others towed it some distance up the stream. A daring young fellow by the name of 'Jim' Dorrel then took his seat on the end of the log, and it was pushed out into the current, with the expectation that it would be carried down stream against the tree where Seamon and Carman were.

"The log was well directed and went straight to the tree. But Jim, in his impatience to help his friends, fell a victim to his good intentions. Making a frantic grab at a branch, he raised himself off the log, which was swept from under him by the raging water, and he soon joined the other two victims upon their forlorn perch.

"The excitement on shore increased and almost the whole population of the village gathered on the river bank.

"Lincoln had the log pulled up stream, and securing another piece of rope, called to the men in the tree to catch it if they could when he should reach the tree. He then straddled the log himself and gave the word to push out into the stream. When he dashed into the tree, he threw the rope over the stump of a broken limb and let it play until it broke the speed of the log which gradually drew back to the tree, holding it there until

the three now nearly frozen men had climbed down and seated themselves astride. He then gave orders to the people on the shore to hold fast to the end of the rope which was tied to the log, and leaving his rope in the tree, he turned the log adrift. The force of the current, acting against the taut rope, swung the log around against the bank and all 'on board' were saved.

"The excited people, who had watched the dangerous experiment with alternate hope and fear, now broke into cheers for Abe Lincoln and praises for his brave act. This adventure made quite a hero of him along the Sangamon, and the people never tired telling of the exploit."

The flatboat was soon loaded and the trip south commenced. But the boat got only to New Salem, where it stuck fast on a milldam, and for nearly twenty-four hours it lay, the bow in the air and the stern in the water. Lincoln's ingenuity, however, came to the rescue. The cargo was first unloaded, and then Lincoln succeeded in tilting the boat forward, after which he bored holes in the bow, thus allowing the water to run out, when the boat was easily moved over the dam. This was considered a great feat and was talked about for years afterward. The boat reached New Orleans in May, and after a month's stay in that city, Lincoln took passage on a steamboat for St. Louis and from that city walked to New Salem.

HIS FIRST OBSERVATION OF SLAVERY.

On this trip and on the one in 1828, Lincoln first saw the true side of the institution of slavery. New Orleans was then one of the largest slave markets in the country, and Mr. J. R. Herndon, afterwards Lincoln's law partner, says:

"In New Orleans for the first time, Lincoln beheld the true horrors of human slavery. He saw negroes in

chains — whipped and scourged. Against this inhumanity his sense of right and justice rebelled, and his mind and conscience were awakened to a realization of what he had often heard and read. No doubt, as one of his companions said, 'Slavery ran the iron into him then and there.'

"One morning in their rambles over the city the trio passed a slave auction. A vigorous and comely mulatto girl was being sold. She underwent a thorough examination at the hands of the bidders; they pinched her flesh and made her trot up and down the room like a horse, to show how she moved and in order, as the auctioneer said, that bidders might satisfy themselves whether the article they were offering to buy was sound or not.' The whole thing was so revolting that Lincoln moved away from the scene with a deep feeling of 'unconquerable hate.' Bidding his companions follow him, he said :

"Boys, let's get away from this. If ever I get a chance to hit that thing (meaning slavery), I'll hit it hard."

A short time after this Lincoln took a job of piloting a flatboat bearing Dr. Nelson, a pioneer, and his family down the Sangamon river and thence down the Illinois river to Beardstown. Nelson was intent on settling in Texas.

LINCOLN'S FIRST SPEECH.

In March, 1830, while in Macon county and when only twenty-one years old, Abraham Lincoln made his first public speech. It was on Waterways. A candidate for the legislature named John F. Posey had made a speech where Lincoln and his cousin John Hanks were at work. John Hanks said "it was a bad one" and that Lincoln could beat it. Hanks turned down a box,

Lincoln mounted it and made his speech. Hanks says : "Abe beat him to death." Lincoln discussed "The Navigation of the Sangamon River."

Lincoln's great ambition to be prominent in public life is early evinced. One of his biographers says :

"Although he had never made a speech except in debating clubs and by the roadside, had read only the books he could pick up and had known only the men who made up the poor, out-of-the-way towns in which he had lived, 'encouraged by his great popularity among his immediate neighbors,' as he says himself, he decided to announce himself in March, 1832, as a candidate for the General Assembly of the state."

A CANDIDATE FAVORING WATERWAY IMPROVEMENTS.

It was a custom of the times for a candidate for office to issue a printed announcement, stating his "sentiments with regard to local affairs." Illinois was in the throes of an Internal Improvement era. Lincoln, knowing his people, believed in improving the Sangamon river so that the Sangamon country people could get to Beardstown and the Mississippi river by water, and he devoted most of his "Announcement" to this subject. Speaking of the Sangamon river he said :

"Respecting this view, I think I may say, without the fear of being contradicted, that its navigation may be rendered completely practicable, as high as the mouth of the south fork or probably higher, to vessels of from twenty-five to thirty tons burden for at least one-half of all common years, and to vessels of much greater burden a part of the time. From my peculiar circumstances, it is probable that for the last twelve months I have given as particular attention to the stage of the water in this river as any other person in the country. In the month

of March, 1831, in company with others, I commenced the building of a flatboat on the Sangamon, and finished and took her out in the course of the spring. Since that time I have been concerned in the mill at New Salem.

“These circumstances are sufficient evidence that I have not been very inattentive to the stages of the water. The time at which we crossed the mill-dam in the last days of April, the water was lower than it had been since the breaking of winter in February or than it was for several weeks after. The principal difficulties we encountered in descending the river were from the drifted timber, which obstructions all know are not difficult to be removed. Knowing almost precisely the height of water at that time, I believe I am safe in saying that it has as often been higher as lower since.

“From this view of the subject it appears that my calculations with regard to the navigation of the Sangamon cannot but be founded in reason ; but, whatever may be its natural advantages, certain it is that it never can be practically useful to any great extent without being greatly improved by art.

“The drifted timber, as I have before mentioned, is the most formidable barrier to this object. Of all parts of this river, none will require so much labor in proportion to make it navigable as the last thirty or thirty-five miles ; and going with the meanderings of the channel, when we are this distance above its mouth we are only between twelve and eighteen miles above Beardstown in something near a straight direction ; and this route is upon such low ground as to retain water in many places during the season and in all parts such as to draw two-thirds or three-fourths of the river water at all high stages.

“This route is on prairie land the whole distance, so that it appears to me, by removing the turf a sufficient width and damming up the old channel, the whole river in a short time would wash its way through, thereby cur-

tailing the distance and increasing the velocity of the current very considerably, while there would be no timber on the banks to obstruct its navigation in future ; and being nearly straight, the timber which might float in at the head would be apt to go clear through. There are also many places above this where the river, in its zigzag course, forms such complete peninsulas as to be easier to cut at the necks than to remove the obstructions from the bends, which if done would also lessen the distance.

“What the cost of this work would be, I am unable to say. It is probable, however, that it would not be greater than is common to streams of the same length. Finally, I believe the improvement of the Sangamon river to be vastly important and highly desirable to the people of the county; and, if elected, any measure in the legislature having this for its object, which may appear judicious, will meet my approbation and receive my support.”

At this time occurred an event that aroused the greatest enthusiasm among the settlers in the Sangamon Valley. Some weeks before Lincoln issued his circulars, it was announced that a steamboat named the “Talisman” would, as soon as the ice was out of the river, make a trip from Cincinnati via the Ohio, Mississippi and Illinois rivers up the Sangamon. The “Talisman” made the trip soon after, and its advent was hailed by all the country as a great event.

Lincoln was hired as pilot to guide the boat up the Sangamon, and he safely brought her to a point near Springfield where she lay the object of an admiring country people for one whole week. Lincoln was also her pilot on her return trip to Beardstown. This was the first and only time a steamboat ever navigated the Sangamon river. Yet this trip for years was regarded as a practical demonstration of the navigability of that river.

LINCOLN IN BLACK HAWK WAR.

Before the campaign was far advanced, the Black Hawk war broke out. Abraham Lincoln then twenty-three years old, on April 28, 1832, volunteered as a soldier and was mustered into the service of the state of Illinois in a company organized among the settlers in and around his home. Lincoln was elected captain of the company, and in after years in speaking of his election, he said that "not since, had he had any success in life which gave him so much satisfaction."

The enlistments for this war were all for twenty and thirty days, as it was believed the war would be of short duration, and on May 27th Captain Lincoln and his company were mustered out of service. Lincoln on the same day re-enlisted as a private in Captain Elijah Ile's company for twenty days' service, and on June 13th his term of enlistment having expired, he was mustered out of the service. But immediately on that day he enlisted as private in the company of Captain Jacob M. Early. The officer who mustered Lincoln "in" and "out" on the 13th of June was Lieutenant Robert Anderson, afterward of Fort Sumter fame.

Lincoln's company was mustered out July 10, 1832, at the mouth of the Whitewater river in Wisconsin, and he in company with George Harrison started for home. Having lost their horses, they came afoot to Dixon, thence walked across the country to Peru, thence down to Peoria where they bought a canoe and floated down the Illinois river to Havana, from where they walked across the country to New Salem.

In 1831 occurred the first Sac and Fox uprising. At this time Governor Reynolds issued a call for troops and at the head of his Illinois army marched against the Indians and destroyed their village at the mouth of Rock river. Lincoln at this time was on his second trip to New Orleans, or he would undoubtedly have enlisted in this campaign.

Of Lincoln's war record, one of his early biographers said :

"Mr. Lincoln, as yet a youth of but twenty-three, faithfully discharged his duty to his country, as a soldier persevering amid peculiar hardships and against the influence of older men around him during the three months' service."

LINCOLN IN THE LEGISLATURE.

Upon arriving home he had but ten days before the August election, to which he in March had announced his candidacy for representative. Lincoln now took up his neglected campaign, and when the election was held on August 6th he found he was defeated. This was his first and only defeat. He ran as a Clay man in a county which was strongly democratic, and though beaten he received two hundred and seventy-seven votes out of the two hundred and eighty-four votes cast in the precinct in which he lived. A few months later Andrew Jackson, for president, received in this precinct a majority of one hundred and fifty-five.

Lincoln now engaged in "keeping store," but spent most of his time studying. In a barrel of old junk he had purchased, he found a copy of Blackstone's Commentaries. Of these he said:

"The more I read, the more intensely interested I became. Never in my whole life was my mind so thoroughly absorbed. I read until I devoured them."

Lincoln was appointed postmaster at New Salem on May 7, 1833, holding the office until May 30, 1836, when the office was discontinued. This position brought in small revenue. He now took up the study of civil engineering, and six weeks after commencing was appointed a deputy surveyor of Sangamon county. He sold his interest in the store in 1834 and devoted his time to surveying and the study of law.

Lincoln tried for the legislature in 1834 and at the August election was chosen as one of the four assemblymen from Sangamon county. He walked from his home to Vandalia to attend his first session. He was the youngest member of that legislature, with the exception of Jesse K. Dubois.

The Ninth General Assembly to which Lincoln had been elected undertook to do great things. A new state bank was chartered and an act was passed providing for the construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal. Lincoln was appointed on the committee on Public Accounts and Expenditures. He offered several resolutions during this session, but was not successful, except in answering roll calls, where his name is invariably recorded. He however was a strong advocate of the construction of the canal.

There appeared in the Sangamon Journal June 13, 1836, an announcement by Abraham Lincoln of his intention to try for reelection. In speaking of Internal Improvements, he said:

“Whether elected or not, I go for distributing the proceeds of the sales of the public lands to the several states, to enable our state in common with others to dig canals and construct railroads without borrowing money and paying the interest on it.”

Lincoln was elected to the Tenth General Assembly and was assigned to the committee on finance.

Sangamon county under the new redistricting sent two senators and seven members of the house. Each one of the nine members was over six feet in height and they were ever afterward known as the “Long Nine.” At this time the question of removing the capital from Vandalia was before the legislature. Springfield was an active candidate and the “Long Nine,” it is said, “rolled along like a snowball, gathering accessions of strength at every turn, until they swelled up a considerable party for

Springfield, which party they managed to take almost as a unit in favor of the Internal Improvement system, in return for which the active supporters of that system were to vote for Springfield to be the seat of government."

This legislature held two sessions, and Lincoln soon became recognized as the whig leader. Among the members were: Stephen A. Douglas, Edward D. Baker, O. H. Browning, William L. D. Ewing, John Logan, father of the late Senator, General John A. Logan, Richard M. Cullom, father of Senator Shelby M. Cullom, General James Shields, Colonel John J. Hardin and a score of others who afterward achieved renown.

Lincoln was licensed to practice law in the courts of Illinois September 9, 1836, and made his appearance in his first case in October. That year Lincoln took an active part in the Internal Improvement measures before the Assembly, but his most active work by far was in behalf of the removal of the capital from Vandalia to Springfield.

In 1838 he was reelected to the Eleventh General Assembly. He had by this time achieved a reputation "not only as a debater but as a watchful and successful representative." So well recognized was his position in his party that by common consent he received the whig vote for the speakership.

During this session occurred an incident which, although not strictly relating to Internal Improvements, is exceedingly interesting. I once heard a very learned and well-known gentleman remark :

"There is only one thing in the life of Abraham Lincoln that I do not like, and I do not know the reason for that. It is said he once jumped out of a window of the house of representatives to escape voting."

Sometime afterward I ran across an account of the incident, and I give it here as it was given by Mr. Joseph Gillespie, a contemporary of Lincoln :

“The banks throughout the country became crippled during the panic of 1837, and they were throughout the west allowed to suspend specie payments. At the session of 1837-38, an act was passed authorizing the State Bank of Illinois to suspend ‘until the end of the next General Assembly.’

“Governor Carlin convened the next session two weeks earlier than the time prescribed for its meeting by the constitution. A quarrel occurred between some of the members of the dominant party and the bank, and it was secretly determined to adjourn the legislature, sine die, at the end of the first two weeks of the next session. That would be the next session after the act allowing the bank to suspend, and it would be compelled to resume while the banks in the other states were suspended, and they would drain the specie from our bank and pay out none themselves.

“The whigs regarded this move as being unjust to the bank and detrimental to the welfare of the people. They got wind of the thing on the morning of the day when the adjournment was to take place, and they instantly resolved that they would absent themselves and thus break up a quorum. But, as the constitution of 1818 would allow such a vote to be taken without a call of the ayes and nays, it was necessary that two whigs should be in the house to call for them, so that it should appear that a quorum was not voting, in which case the legislature could only adjourn from day to day, and the following Monday they would be convened by the constitution.

“Lincoln and I were selected to call the ayes and nays, and the whigs promised to keep out of the way. When the motion was put we called for the ayes and nays, and there was no quorum voting. A call of the house was ordered, and the sergeant-at-arms was sent for the absentees, many of whom, we discovered, allowed themselves to be caught and brought in.

“Lincoln and I began to suspect that they had a quorum. Finding that the whigs who had been brought in would not withdraw, we got them to agree to call for the ayes and nays, and we concluded to leave. But ascertaining that the doors were locked, we raised the windows of the church in which the session was held and jumped out. The sergeant-at-arms, William Murphy, reported that he had commanded Cyrus Edwards to attend in his place.

“ ‘What did he say?’ inquired the speaker of the house.

“ ‘He said he would not.’

“ ‘What did you say?’

“ ‘I told him I would take him by force.’

“ ‘What did he do?’

“ ‘He raised his cane and said : ‘Touch me at your peril!’

“ ‘What did you do?’

“ ‘I sloped, sir.’”

For the fourth successive time Mr. Lincoln was elected to the legislature in 1840. This was the last election that he would accept, as in the last legislature he was the acknowledged whig leader and the candidate of his party for speaker. One of his biographers speaking of Lincoln in 1842 at the close of his legislative career says:

“At the close of this period, with scarcely any consciousness of the fact himself, and with no noisy demonstrations or flashy ostentation in his behalf from his friends, he was really one of the foremost political men in the state.”

At the time Lincoln was elected to the legislature, the state was in a prosperous condition. Yet the legislature, seeking to emulate the example of some of the older states, undertook to improve conditions by chartering banks, building railroads to connect distant parts of the

state, dig canals and to improve the navigation of the Kaskaskia, Illinois, Great and Little Wabash and Rock rivers to all of which the state lent its aid. It was argued at public gatherings that "Illinois had all the natural advantages which constitute a great state; a rich soil, variety of climate and great extent of territory."

All it needed, it was said, was inhabitants and enterprise. Cities and towns were laid out in all sections of the state. Grave fears were felt that the whole country was to be laid out in towns and that no land would be left for farming purposes.

Counties that were not provided with projected railroads or canals were placated by promises to divide two hundred thousand dollars among them according to population. One forcible argument advanced was that the state would derive a very large sum as rent for the water power made by these improvements. The Internal Improvement era is best characterized by Governor Duncan in his valedictory address. He said :

"Experience has now sufficiently shown that all my objections to it must in time be fully realized. * * * That there should have been many mistakes committed and much waste of public money in conducting a system of internal improvements upon so large a scale, in a country almost entirely destitute of skill and experience in such works, was to be expected. But I confess they have occurred to an extent never anticipated by myself and, whether by mistake or design, it is very manifest that large sums have been squandered on objects of little or no general utility, and in some cases to the detriment of the public interest."

Lincoln was an ardent advocate of all internal improvements, especially the improvement of rivers, upon which subject he brought to bear his experience as a boatman and his knowledge otherwise acquired. In his advocacy of these subjects he was prompted by honest motives and a practical and personal knowledge of boat-

ing, steamboats and waterways superior undoubtedly to that possessed by any of his colleagues.

In 1843 Lincoln tried to secure the nomination for congress. One of the stories told by his political enemies was that he was an aristocrat. In speaking of this Lincoln in a letter dated March 26, 1843, to Martin M. Morris said :

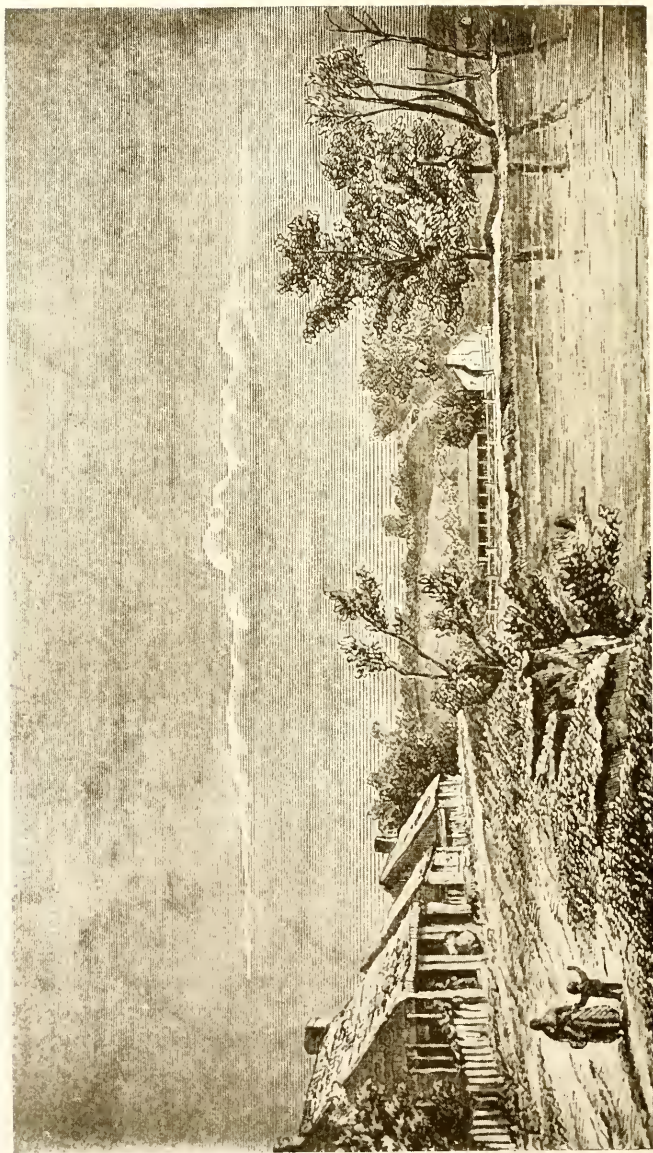
“It would astonish, if not amuse, the older citizens to learn that I (a stranger, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy, working on a flatboat at ten dollars a month) have been put down here as the candidate of pride, wealth and aristocratic family distinction.”

LINCOLN AT THE CHICAGO RIVER AND HARBOR CONVENTION.

In July, 1846, a bill for the improvement of harbors and the navigation of rivers passed both houses of congress. President James Polk vetoed the bill August 3. Among the items in this bill were \$15,000 for Buffalo harbor, \$40,000 for Erie harbor, \$20,000 for Cleveland harbor, \$80,000 for Racine, Little Fort, Southport, Milwaukee and Chicago Dredge boat. President Polk said : “It would seem the dictate of wisdom under such circumstances to husband our means and not waste them on comparatively unimportant objects.”

The war with Mexico was in progress and the north became aroused. The Chicago Daily Journal of August 12, 1846, in commenting on the message, said : “Husband our means forsooth. Are not millions being squandered by this same James K. Polk for the invasion of Mexico and the extension of slavery?”

Another one of Polk's reasons was that “some one of the objects of the appropriation, contained in this bill,



ANDERSON CREEK FERRY WHERE ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WAS FERRYMAN

are local in their character, and lie within the limits of a single state; and though in the language of the bill they are called harbors, they are not connected with foreign commerce, nor are they places of refuge or of shelter for our navy or commercial marine on the ocean or lake shores."

At this time, the following vessels navigated the lakes above the Falls of Niagara: Steamboats 52, tonnage 29,500; propellers 8, tonnage 2,500; brigs 50, tonnage 11,000; schooners 270, tonnage 42,000. Total boats, 380; total tonnage, 76,000. The cost of the construction of these vessels was \$4,600,000.

Polk's veto aroused the people of the north and north-west, and Monday, July 5, 1847, pursuant to a widely advertised call, a convention was held in Chicago at which delegates from nineteen states were present. Horace Greeley was present, representing the New York Tribune. In an article published in that paper Saturday, July 17, 1847, he said: "A judicious estimate makes the number present today 20,000 men, of whom 10,000 are here as members of the convention."

New York state sent about 300. The Chicago Evening Journal of Tuesday, July 6, 1847, in a lengthy account of the convention, among other things, said:

"It was a display, such as the west had never before beheld, but we value it not for the badges and banners and pageantry, not for its array of military or its blasts of music, but for the community of interest and of feeling that it indicated, thus gathering from every quarter of a republic, wide as the New World and comprehended by two oceans, gathering here at the hithermost extremity of the great lake chain, the trading post, the very outpost of civilization, no, no, not that, for that was Chicago of 1812, but at the city of sixteen thousand, the Chicago of today, in itself a glorious exponent of the triumph of enterprise."

To this convention as delegates from Sangamon county, Illinois, came Dr. E. H. Merryman, Fred Doyle and Hon. Abraham Lincoln. The states were called alphabetically and each was requested to select one of their number as a committee to nominate officers for the permanent organization of the convention. Illinois named Abraham Lincoln.

The Chicago Journal of July 6, 1847, said :

"We are happy to see the Hon. Abraham Lincoln in attendance upon the convention, the only whig representative to congress from this state. This is his first visit to the commercial emporium of the state, and we have no doubt his visit will impress him more deeply if possible with the importance and inspire a higher zeal for the great interests of river and harbor improvements. We expect much from him as a representative in congress, and we have no doubt our expectations will be more than realized, for never was reliance placed in a nobler heart and a sounder judgment. We know the banner he bears will never be soiled."

The same paper says in its convention report :

"Hon. A. Lincoln of Illinois in response to numerous calls made his appearance on the stand and addressed the convention."

In the forenoon David Dudley Field of New York had spoken against the right of the federal government to improve rivers and harbors, and Lincoln was called to answer him. One of his early biographers says :

"A brief fifteen-minute speech of his on that occasion, of which there appears to be no report extant, is still remembered by many of those who heard it as one of the most eloquent and impressive efforts of that memorable convention."

As to Lincoln's appearance at this period, the following reminiscence by Hon. E. B. Washburne is given:

"One afternoon several of us sat on the sidewalk under the balcony in front of the Sherman House, and among

the number the accomplished scholar and unrivalled orator Lisle Smith. He suddenly interrupted the conversation by exclaiming: "There is Lincoln on the other side of the street! Just look at "Old Abe!" And from that time we all called him "Old Abe." No one who saw him can forget his personal appearance at that time. Tall and angular and awkward, he had on a short waistcoated thin swallow-tail coat, a short vest of same material, thin pantaloons, scarcely coming down to his ankles, a straw hat and a pair of brogans with woolen socks."

The New York Semi-Weekly Tribune gave a full account of the convention and from its report of July 17, 1847, we may learn how Lincoln at this time impressed the great editor. In his afternoon report of July 6, Mr. Greeley said:

"In the afternoon Hon. Abraham Lincoln, a tall specimen of an Illinoisan, just elected to congress from the only whig district in the state, was called out and spoke briefly and happily in reply to Mr. Field."

LINCOLN'S SPEECH IN CONGRESS ON WATERWAYS.

In May, 1846, Lincoln had been nominated by the whigs for congress. His opponent was Peter Cartwright, the celebrated Methodist circuit rider. The campaign was vigorously prosecuted on both sides, but Lincoln was elected by over 1500 majority.

In November, 1847, Lincoln left for Washington. He had hardly taken his seat in congress before he had an opportunity to take part in the consideration of Internal Improvements. Following Polk's veto and the Chicago river and harbor meeting, there was great enthusiasm for river and harbor improvements.

Lincoln voted for the following resolution December 20, 1847:

Resolved, That if in the judgment of congress it be necessary to improve the navigation of a river to expe-

dite and render secure the movements of our army and save from delay and loss, our arms and munitions of war, congress has the power to improve such river.

Resolved, That if it be necessary for the preservation of the lives of our seamen, repairs, safety or maintenance of our vessels of war, to improve a harbor or inlet, either on our Atlantic or lake coast, congress has the power to make such improvement.

Lincoln's record in congress was brief. He made several speeches, the most notable, but less known one, on Internal Improvements.

Congressman Frank O. Lowden, of Illinois, at a banquet tendered the delegates to the Upper Mississippi River Improvement Association at Moline, Illinois, by the manufacturers of that place on October 22, 1907, among other things said:

"I had the good fortune within the last few days to read a speech which Abraham Lincoln made in the house of representatives of this old question of Internal Improvements. That was nearly sixty years ago. I was surprised, as I ought not to have been, at the strong argument which he advanced in favor of the general government undertaking Internal Improvements. The same masterful accuracy and analysis were found in that speech which distinguished all his utterances, and if you have not read it I do hope that all of you who are interested in this great question will take the first opportunity to read it. Of course, one of the great questions which they had to meet at that time has since been decided by the courts, and that is the question of constitutionality. This question no longer enters into the thing, but among the questions discussed beside the question of constitutionality was one which is just as important today as it was then, namely: that the improvement of a waterway is not a local improvement in any proper sense of the word. He admitted that one section would be, perhaps, more bene-

fited than remote sections, but he insisted that after all it was in the interest of commerce which made for the benefit of the entire community.’

Lincoln's speech was made on June 20, 1848, in committee of the whole house, and is reported in the Appendix to the Congressional Globe for that session (p. 709). It was as follows:

Mr. Lincoln said :

“Mr. Chairman : I wish at all times in no way to practice any fraud upon the house or the committee, and I also desire to do nothing which may be very disagreeable to any of the members. I therefore state, in advance, that my object in taking the floor is to make a speech on the general subject of Internal Improvements ; and if I am out of order in doing so, I give the Chair an opportunity of so deciding, and I will take my seat.

The Chair : “I will not undertake to anticipate what the gentleman may say on the subject of Internal Improvements. He will, therefore, proceed in his remarks, and if any question of order shall be made, the Chair will then decide it.”

Mr. Lincoln : “At an early day of this session the president sent to us what may properly be termed an Internal Improvement veto message. The late democratic convention which sat at Baltimore and which nominated General Cass for the presidency, adopted a set of resolutions, now called the democratic platform, among which is one in these words :

“ ‘That the constitution does not confer upon the general government the power to commence and carry on a general system of Internal Improvements.’

“General Cass, in his letter accepting the nomination, holds this language :

“ ‘I have carefully read the resolutions of the democratic national convention, laying down the platform of our political faith, and I adhere to them as firmly as I approve them cordially.’

“These things, taken together, show that the question of Internal Improvements is now more distinctly made—has become more intense than in any former period. It can no longer be avoided. The veto message and the Baltimore resolution I understand to be, in substance, the same thing ; the latter being the more general statement, of which the former is the amplification—the bill of particulars. While I know there are many democrats, on the floor and elsewhere, who disapprove that message, I understand that all who shall vote for General Cass will thereafter be considered as having approved it, as having indorsed all its doctrines. I suppose all, or nearly all, the democrats will vote for him. Many of them will do so, not because they like his position on this question, but because they prefer him, being wrong in this, to another whom they consider further wrong on other questions. In this way the Internal Improvement democrats are to be, by a sort of forced consent, carried over and arrayed against themselves on this measure of policy.

“General Cass, once elected, will not trouble himself to make a constitutional argument, or perhaps any argument at all, when he shall veto a river or harbor bill. He will consider it a sufficient answer to all democratic murmurs to point to Mr. Polk’s message, and to the democratic platform. This being the case, the question of improvements is verging to a final crisis ; and the friends of the policy must now battle, and battle manfully, or surrender all.

LINCOLN DISCUSSES THE PRESIDENT’S VETO.

“In this view, humble as I am, I wish to review and contrast as well as I may the general positions of this veto message. When I say general positions, I mean to

exclude from consideration so much as relates to the present embarrassed state of the treasury, in consequence of the Mexican war.

“Those general positions are : That Internal Improvements ought not to be made by the general government.

1. Because they would overwhelm the treasury ;

2. Because, while their burdens would be general, their benefits would be local and partial, involving an obnoxious inequality ;

3. Because they would be unconstitutional ;

4. Because the states may do enough by the levy and collection of tonnage duties ; or, if not,

5. That the constitution may be amended.

“ ‘Do nothing at all, lest you do something wrong,’ is the sum of these positions—is the sum of this message ; and this, with the exception of what is said about constitutionality, applying as forcibly to making improvements by state authority as by the national authority. So that we must abandon the improvements of the country altogether, by any and every authority, or we may resist and repudiate the doctrines of this message. Let us attempt the latter.

“The first position is, that a system of Internal Improvement would overwhelm the treasury.

“That in such a system there is a tendency to undue expansion is not to be denied. Such tendency is founded in the nature of the subject. A member of congress will prefer voting for a bill which contains an appropriation for his district, to voting for one which does not ; and when a bill shall be expanded till every district shall be provided for, that it will be too greatly expanded is obvious. But is this any more true in congress than in a state legislature ? If a member of congress must have an appropriation for his district, so a member of a legislature must have for his county ; and if one will overwhelm the national treasury, so the other will overwhelm the state treasury. Go where we will, the difficulty is

the same. Allow it to drive us from the halls of congress, and it will just as easily drive us from the state legislature.

“Let us, then, grapple with it and test its strength. Let us, judging of the future by the past, ascertain whether there may not be, in the discretion of congress, a sufficient power to limit and restrain this expansion tendency within reasonable and proper bounds. The president himself values the evidence of the past. He tells us that at a certain point of our history more than two hundred millions of dollars have been applied for to make improvements, and this he does to prove that the treasury would be overwhelmed by such a system. Why did he not tell us how much was granted? Would not that have been better evidence?

“Let us turn to it, and see what it proves. In the message, the president tells us that ‘during the four succeeding years, embraced by the administration of President Adams, the power not only to appropriate money, but to apply it, under the direction and authority of the general government, as well to the construction of roads as to the improvement of harbors and rivers, was fully asserted and exercised.’

“This, then, was the period of greatest enormity. These, if any, must have been days of the two hundred million dollars. And how much do you suppose was really expended for improvements during those four years? Two hundred millions? One hundred? Fifty? Ten? Five? No, sir, less than two millions. As shown by authentic documents, the expenditures on improvements during 1825, 1826, 1827 and 1828 amounted to \$1,879,627.01. These four years were the period of Mr. Adams’ administration, nearly and substantially. This fact shows that when the power to make improvements was ‘fully asserted and exercised,’ the congresses did keep within reasonable limits; and what has been done, it seems to me, can be done again.

LOCAL IMPROVEMENTS ARE A GENERAL BENEFIT.

“Now for the second position of the message, namely ; that the burdens of improvements would be general, while their benefits would be local and partial, involving an obnoxious inequality. That there is some degree of truth in this position I shall not deny. No commercial object of government patronage can be so exclusively general, as not to be of some peculiar local advantage ; but on the other hand, nothing is so local as not to be of some general advantage.

“The navy, as I understand it, was established and is maintained at a great annual expense partly to be ready for war when war shall come, but partly also, and perhaps chiefly, for the protection of our commerce on the high seas. This latter object is, for all I can see, in principle the same as Internal Improvements. The driving a pirate from the track of commerce on the broad ocean and the removing a snag from its more narrow path in the Mississippi river, cannot, I think, be distinguished in principle. Each is done to save life and property, and for nothing else. The navy, then, is the most general in its benefits of all this class of objects ; and yet even the navy is of some peculiar advantage to Charleston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston, beyond what it is to the interior towns of Illinois.

“The next most general object I can think of, would be improvements on the Mississippi river and its tributaries. They touch thirteen of our states—Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Iowa. Now, I suppose it will not be denied, that these thirteen states are a little more interested in improvements on that great river than are the remaining seventeen. These instances of the navy and the Mississippi river show clearly that there is something of local advantage in the most general objects.

“But the converse is also true, nothing is so local as not to be of some general benefit. Take for instance, the Illinois and Michigan canal. Considered apart from its effects it is perfectly local. Every inch of it is within the state of Illinois. That canal was first opened for business last April. In a very few days we were all gratified to learn, among other things, that sugar had been carried from New Orleans, through the canal, to Buffalo in New York. This sugar took this route doubtless because it was cheaper than the old route. Supposing the benefit in the reduction of the cost of carriage to be shared between seller and buyer, the result is that the New Orleans merchant sold his sugar a little dearer, and the people of Buffalo sweetened their coffee a little cheaper than before ; a benefit resulting from the canal, not to Illinois where the canal is, but to Louisiana and New York, where it is not.

“In other transactions Illinois will, of course, have her share and perhaps the larger share too in the benefits of the canal, but the instance of the sugar clearly shows that the benefits of an improvement are by no means confined to the particular locality of the improvement itself.

“The just conclusion from all this is, that if the nation refuse to make improvements of the more general kind, because their benefits may be somewhat local, a state may, for the same reason, refuse to make an improvement of a local kind, because its benefits may be somewhat general. A state may well say to the nation: ‘If you will do nothing for me I will do nothing for you.’ Thus it is seen, that if this argument of ‘inequality’ is sufficient anywhere, it is sufficient everywhere, and puts an end to improvements altogether. I hope and believe, that if both the nation and the states would in good faith, in their respective spheres, do what they could in the way of improvements, what of inequality might be produced in one place might be compensated in another, and that the sum of the whole might not be very unequal.

“But suppose, after all, there should be some degree of inequality. Inequality is certainly never to be embraced for its own sake; but is every good thing to be discarded which may be inseparably connected with some degree of it? If so, we must discard all government. This capitol is built at the public expense, for the public benefit; but does anyone doubt that it is of some peculiar local advantage to the property holders and business people of Washington? Shall we remove it for this reason? And if so, where shall we set it down and be free from the difficulty? To make sure of our object, shall we locate it nowhere and leave congress hereafter to hold its sessions as the loafer lodged, ‘in spots about?’

“I make no special allusion to the present president when I say, there are few stronger cases in this world of ‘burden to the many, and benefit to the few’—of ‘inequality’—than the presidency itself is by some thought to be. An honest laborer digs coal at about seventy cents a day, while the president digs abstractions at about seventy dollars a day. The coal is clearly worth more than the abstractions, and yet what a monstrous inequality in the prices! Does the president, for this reason, propose to abolish the presidency? He does not and he ought not. The true rule, in determining to embrace or reject anything, is not whether it have any evil in it, but whether it have more of evil than good.

“There are few things wholly evil or wholly good. Almost everything, especially of government policy, is an inseparable compound of the two; so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded. On this principle, the president, his friends and the world generally act on most subjects. Why not apply it, then, upon this question? Why, as to improvements, magnify the evil and stoutly refuse to see any good in them?

THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION.

“Mr. Chairman, on the third position of the message (the constitutional question) I have not much to say. Being the man I am, and speaking when I do, I feel that in any attempt at an original, constitutional argument, I should not be, and ought not to be, listened to patiently. The oldest and the best of men have gone over the whole ground long ago. I shall attempt but little more than a brief notice of what some of them have said. In relation to Mr. Jefferson’s views, I read from Mr. Polk’s veto message:

‘President Jefferson, in his message to congress in 1806, recommended an amendment of his constitution, with a view to apply an anticipated surplus in the treasury ‘to the great purpose of the public education, roads, rivers, canals and such other objects of public improvements as it may be thought proper to add to the constitutional enumeration of the federal powers.’ And he adds: ‘I suppose an amendment to the constitution, by consent of the states necessary, because the objects now recommended are not among those enumerated in the constitution, and to which it permits the public moneys to be applied.’ In 1825, he repeated in his published letters, the opinion that such power has been conferred upon congress.’

“I introduce this not to controvert just now the constitutional opinion, but to show that on the question of expediency Mr. Jefferson’s opinion was against the present president—that this opinion of Mr. Jefferson, in one branch at least, is in the hands of Mr. Polk, like McFingal’s gun:

“‘Bears wide and kicks the owner over.’

“But, to the constitutional question. In 1826, Chancellor Kent first published his Commentaries on American Law. He devoted a portion of one of the lectures to the question of the authority of congress to appropriate public moneys for internal improvements. He men-

tions that the question had never been brought under judicial consideration, and proceeds to give a brief summary of the discussions it had undergone between the legislative and executive branches of the government. He shows that the legislative branch had usually been for, and the executive against, the power till the period of Mr. J. Q. Adams' administration, at which point he considered the executive influence as withdrawn from opposition and added to the support of the power. In 1844 the Chancellor published a new edition of his Commentaries, in which he adds some notes of what had transpired on the question since 1826. I have not time to read the original text or the notes, but the whole may be found on page 267 and the two or three following pages of the first volume of the edition of 1844. As what Chancellor Kent seems to consider the sum of the whole, I read from one of the notes:

“‘Mr. Justice Story, in his Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States, Vol. 2, page 429 - 440, and again, page 519 - 538, has stated at large the arguments for and against the proposition that congress has a constitutional authority to lay taxes and to apply the power to regulate commerce as a means directly to encourage and protect domestic manufactures; and, without giving any opinion of his own on the contested doctrine, he has left the reader to draw his own conclusion. I should think, however, from the arguments as stated, that every mind which has taken no part in the discussions and felt no prejudice or territorial bias on either side of the question, would deem the arguments in favor of the congressional power vastly superior.’

“‘It will be seen, that in this extract, the power to make improvements is not directly mentioned; but by examining the context both of Kent and of Story, it will appear that the power mentioned in the extract and the power to make improvements are regarded as identical. It is not to be denied that many great and

good men have been against the power; but it is insisted that quite as many as great and as good have been for it; and it is shown that on a full survey of the whole, Chancellor Kent was of opinion that the arguments of the latter were vastly superior.

“This is but the opinion of a man, but who was that man? He was one of the ablest and most learned lawyers of his age or of any other age. It is no disparagement to Mr. Polk nor, indeed, to any one who devotes much time to politics, to be placed far behind Chancellor Kent as a lawyer. His attitude was most favorable to correct conclusions. He wrote coolly and in retirement. He was struggling to rear a durable monument of fame; and he well knew that truth and thoroughly sound reasoning were the only sure foundations. Can the party opinion of a party president on a law question, as this purely is, be at all compared or set in opposition to that of such a man in such an attitude as Chancellor Kent?

“This constitutional question will probably never be better settled than it is, until it shall pass under judicial consideration; but I do think that no man who is clear on this question of expediency need feel his conscience much pricked upon this.

“Mr. Chairman, the president seems to think that enough may be done in the way of improvements by means of tonnage duties, under state authority, with the consent of the general government. Now, I suppose this matter of tonnage duties is well enough in its own sphere. I suppose it may be efficient to make slight improvements and repairs in harbors already in use and not much out of repair. But if I have any correct general idea of it, it must be wholly inefficient for any general beneficent purposes of improvement. I know very little, or rather nothing at all, of the practical matter of levying and collecting tonnage duties; but I suppose one of its principles must be to lay a duty for the improvement of any particular harbor upon the tonnage coming into that

harbor. To do otherwise—to collect money in one harbor to be expended on improvements in another—would be an extremely aggravated form of that inequality which the president so much deprecates. If I be right in this, how could we make any entirely new improvements by means of tonnage duties? How make a road, a canal or clear a greatly obstructed river? The idea that we could involves the same absurdity of the Irish bull about the new boots: ‘I shall niver git ’em on,’ says Patrick, ‘till I wear ’em a day or two, and stretch ’em a little.’ We shall never make a canal by tonnage duties until it shall already have been made awhile so the tonnage can get into it.

“After all, the president concludes that possibly there may be some great objects of improvements which can not be effected by tonnage duties and which therefore may be expedient for the general government to take in hand. Accordingly, he suggests, in case any such be discovered, the propriety of amending the constitution. Amend it for what? If, like Jefferson, the president thought improvements expedient but not constitutional, it would be natural enough for him to recommend such an amendment; but hear what he says in this very message:

“‘In view of these portentous consequences, I cannot but think that this course of legislature should be arrested, even were there nothing to forbid it in the fundamental laws of our Union.’

“For what, then, would he have the constitution amended? With him it is a proposition to remove one impediment, merely to be met by others, which in his opinion cannot be removed—to enable congress to do what, in his opinion, they ought not to do if they could.”

Here Mr. Meade, of Virginia, inquired if Mr. Lincoln understood the president to be opposed on grounds of expediency to any and every improvement. To which Mr. Lincoln answered:

“In the very part of his message of which I am now speaking, I understood him as giving some vague expressions in favor of some possible objects of improvements; but, in doing so, I understand him to be directly in the teeth of his arguments in other parts of it. Neither the president nor anyone can possibly specify an improvement which shall not be clearly liable to one or another of the objections he has urged on the score of expediency. I have shown, and might show again, that no work, no object can be so general as to dispense its benefits with precise equality; and this inequality is chief among the ‘portentous consequences’ for which he declares that improvements should be arrested. No, sir; when the president intimates that something in the way of improvements may properly be done by the general government, he is shrinking from the conclusions to which his own arguments would force him. He feels that the improvements of this broad and goodly land are a mighty interest; and he is unwilling to confess to the people, or perhaps to himself, that he has built an argument which when pressed to its conclusion entirely annihilates this interest.

“I have already said that no one who is satisfied of the expediency of making improvements need be much uneasy in his conscience about its constitutionality.

“I wish now to submit a few remarks on the general proposition of amending the constitution. As a general rule, I think we would do much better to let it alone. No slight occasion should tempt us to touch it. Better rather habituate ourselves to think of it as unalterable. It can scarcely be made better than it is. New provisions would introduce new difficulties and thus create and increase appetite for further change. No, sir; let it stand as it is. Now, hands have never touched it. The men who made it have done their work and have passed away. Who shall improve on what they did?

ANSWERS THE ARGUMENT OF INEQUALITY.

“Mr. Chairman, for the purpose of reviewing this message in the least possible time, as well as for the sake of distinctness, I have analyzed its arguments as well as I could and reduced them to the propositions I have stated. I have now examined them in detail. I wish to detain the committee only a little while longer with some general remarks on the subject of improvements. That the subject is a difficult one, cannot be denied. Still, it is no more difficult in congress than in the state legislatures, in the counties or in the smallest municipal districts which everywhere exist. All can recur to instances of this difficulty in the case of county roads, bridges and the like.

“One man is offended because a road passes over his land; and another is offended because it does not pass over his; one is dissatisfied because the bridge, for which he is taxed, crosses the river on a different road from that which leads from his house to town; another cannot bear that the county should get in debt for these same roads and bridges; while not a few struggle hard to have roads located over their lands, and then stoutly refuse to let them be opened, until they are first paid the damages. Even between the different wards and streets of towns and cities, we find this same wrangling and difficulty. Now these are no other than the very difficulties against which and out of which the president constructs his objections of ‘inequality’, ‘speculation,’ and ‘crushing the treasury.’ There is but a single alternative about them — they are sufficient, or they are not. If sufficient, they are sufficient out of congress as well as in it, and there is the end. We must reject them as insufficient, or lie down and do nothing by any authority. Then, difficulty though there be, let us meet and overcome it.

“‘Attempt the end, and never stand to doubt;
Nothing so hard, but search will find it out.’

“Determine that the thing can and shall be done, and then we shall find the way. The tendency to undue expansion is unquestionably the chief difficulty. How to do something, and still not to do too much is the desideratum. Let each contribute his mite in the way of suggestion. The late Silas Wright in a letter to the Chicago convention contributed his, which was worth something; and I now contribute mine, which may be worth nothing. At all events, it will mislead nobody and therefore will do no harm. I would not borrow money. I am against an overwhelming, crushing system. Suppose that at each session, congress shall first determine how much money can for that year be spared for improvements; then apportion that sum to the most important objects. So far, all is easy; but how shall we determine which are the most important? On this question comes the collision of interests. I shall be slow to acknowledge that your harbor or your river is more important than mine, and vice versa. To clear this difficulty, let us have that same statistical information which the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Vinton) suggested at the beginning of this session. In that information we shall have a stern, unbending basis of facts — a basis in nowise subject to whim, caprice, or local interest. The pre-limited amount of means will save us from doing too much, and the statistics will save us from doing what we do, in wrong places. Adopt and adhere to this course, and, it seems to me, the difficulty is cleared.

“One of the gentlemen from South Carolina (Mr. Rhett) very much deprecates these statistics. He particularly objects, as I understand him, to counting all the pigs and chickens in the land. I do not perceive much force in the objection. It is true, that if everything be enumerated a portion of such statistics may not be very

useful to this object. Such products of the country as are to be consumed where they are produced, need no roads and rivers, no means of transportation, and have no very proper connection with this subject. The surplus, that which is produced in one place to be consumed in another; the capacity of each locality for producing a greater surplus; the natural means of transportation and their susceptibility of improvement; the hindrances, delays and losses of life and property during transportation, and the causes of each would be among the most valuable statistics in this connection.

“From these it would readily appear where a given amount of expenditure would do the most good. These statistics might be equally accessible, as they would be equally useful, to both the nation and the states. In this way and by these means, let the nation take hold of the larger works and the states the smaller ones; and thus, working in a meeting direction, directly, but steadily and firmly, what is made unequal in one place, may be equalized in another, extravagance avoided, and the whole country put on that career of prosperity which shall correspond with its extent of territory, its natural resources and the intelligence and enterprise of its people.”

Lincoln's speech shows careful preparation. The authorities he used were secured from the Library of Congress. Today a member of congress wanting authorities, leaves his desk, goes to a telephone in the cloak-room and calls up the Congressional Library and makes his request. The librarian with the aid of innumerable clerks at once gets the books from their shelves, carries them to a large automatic tube and by means of compressed air in a minute's time wafts, so to speak, the books to the halls of congress, almost on top of the member's desk. In Lincoln's day this was not so. The librarian of congress at that time told how Lincoln got his authorities :

“Mr. Lincoln came to the library one day for the purpose of procuring some law books which he wanted to take to his room for examination. Getting together all the books he wanted, he placed them in a pile on a table. Taking a large bandanna handkerchief from his pocket, he tied them up, and putting a stick which he had brought with him through a knot he had made in the handkerchief, adjusting the package of books to his stick, he shouldered it and marched off from the library to his room. In a few days he returned the books in the same way.”

LINCOLN'S VISIT TO NIAGARA FALLS.

In the summer of 1848 Lincoln went to the New England States, where he made a number of political speeches, and in September on his homeward trip he stopped off to see Niagara. After his death there were found among his papers various notes for lectures, among which was the following which shows “how deeply his mind was affected by the majesty of that mighty wonder:”

“Niagara Falls! By what mysterious power is it that millions and millions are drawn from all parts of the world to gaze upon Niagara Falls?

“There is no mystery about the thing itself. Every effect is just as any intelligent man, knowing the causes, would anticipate without seeing it. If the water moving onward in a great river reaches a point where there is a perpendicular jog of a hundred feet in descent in the bottom of the river, it is plain the water will have a violent and continuous plunge at that point. It is also plain, the water, thus plunging, will foam and roar and send up a mist continuously, in which last, during sunshine, there will be perpetual rainbows.

“The mere physical of Niagara Falls is only this. Yet this is really a very small part of that world's won-

der. Its power to excite reflection and emotion is its great charm. The geologist will demonstrate that the plunge, or fall, was once at Lake Ontario, and has worn its way back to its present position; he will ascertain how fast it is wearing now, and so get a basis for determining how long it has been wearing back from Lake Ontario, and finally demonstrate by it that this world is at least fourteen thousand years old.

“A philosopher of a slightly different turn will say: ‘Niagara Falls is only the lip of the basin out of which pours all the surplus water which drains down on two or three hundred thousand square miles of earth’s surface.’ He will estimate with approximate accuracy that five hundred thousand tons of water fall with their full weight a distance of a hundred feet each minute—thus exerting a force equal to the lifting of the same weight, through the same space, in the same time.

“But still there is more. It calls up the indefinite past. When Columbus first sought this continent—when Christ suffered on the Cross—when Moses led Israel through the Red Sea—nay, even when Adam first came from the hand of his Maker; then, as now, Niagara was roaring here. The eyes of that species of extinct giants whose bones fill the mounds of America have gazed on Niagara, as ours do now. Contemporary with the first race of men, and older than the first man, Niagara is strong and fresh today as ten thousand years ago. The Mammoth and Mastodon, so long dead that fragments of their monstrous bones alone testify that they ever lived, have gazed on Niagara—in that long, long time never still for a single moment, never dried, never froze, never slept, never rested.”

LINCOLN’S PATENT BOAT.

There is no question Lincoln understood the navigation of our western rivers and that he was thoroughly

familiar with those rivers, their currents, snags, sandbars and other impediments. That he thought much on the improvement of waterways is evinced, for in 1849 he applied for and on May 22d of that year secured a patent for "an improved method of lifting vessels over shoals." The model is a bellows attached to each side of a boat, below the water line, and which, when it was desired to lift the boat over shoals or sandbars, were inflated full of air. The model was whittled by Lincoln apparently out of a cigar box and a shingle, and is now in the patent office in Washington.

THE BRIDGE CASE.

The cornerstone was laid September 1, 1854, for the first bridge across the Mississippi river between Davenport, Iowa, and the Island of Rock Island. The bridge was to be built for the then Chicago and Rock Island road. St. Louis had hitherto enjoyed a monopoly of the western commerce. Her merchants became very much exercised over the contemplated bridge. The St. Louis Chamber of Commerce adopted the following:

"Resolved, That a bridge is unconstitutional, an obstruction to navigation, dangerous, and that it is the duty of every western state, river city and town to take immediate action to prevent the erection of such a structure."

A resolution was also passed by the city council of St. Louis, instructing the mayor of that city to apply to the supreme court of the United States for an injunction, restraining the building of the bridge.

This was the beginning of a long and bitter warfare carried on by many of the river cities and towns and the steamboat people against the railroads. The steamboat Effie Afton on May 6th, 1856, while trying to pass through the draw pier of the then completed bridge, was

struck by a wind and driven against a pier. The boat took fire, which was communicated to the bridge, a portion of which was consumed. The steamer was a total wreck.

The owners of the boat commenced suit against the bridge company, and in 1857 Abraham Lincoln was called into the case as one of the counsel for the company. In Chicago it was openly charged that the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce had bribed the captain to purposely run his boat against the pier.

The case was tried in the United States circuit court at Chicago in September, 1857, Judge John McLean presiding. The case was entitled, Hurd et al vs. Railroad-Bridge Company. The trial lasted fourteen days, and it was probably the most noted and widely advertised case ever tried in Chicago up to that time. The Hon. R. R. Hitt, afterward member of congress from the Thirteenth Illinois district was the reporter. H. M. Wead of Peoria, T. D. Lincoln of Cincinnati and C. Beckwith of Chicago represented the steamboat interests while Norman B. Judd of Chicago, Joseph Knox of Rock Island and Abraham Lincoln of Springfield represented the bridge company. The Chicago Press gave a full account daily of the trial, also a synopsis of the arguments of counsel, under date of September 25th. It said :

“Mr. A. Lincoln in his address to the jury was very successful, as far as clear statement and close logic was concerned.”

The jury, however, failed to agree, which was considered a victory for the bridge company.

Judge H. W. Blodgett who was present at the trial, said the steamboat men relied on two points :

“First. That the river was the great waterway for the commerce of the valley, and could not legally be obstructed by a bridge.

“Second. That this particular bridge was so located with reference to the channel of the river at that point

as to make it a peril to all water craft navigating the river and an unnecessary obstruction to navigation.

"The first proposition had not at that time been directly passed upon by the supreme court of the United States, although the Wheeling bridge case involved the question ; but the court had evaded a decision upon it, by holding that the Wheeling bridge was so low as to be an unnecessary obstruction to the use of the river by steamboats. The discussion of the first proposition on the part of the bridge company devolved mainly upon Mr. Abraham Lincoln.

"I listened with much interest to his argument on this point, and while I was not impressed by it as a specially eloquent effort (as the word eloquent is generally understood), I have always considered it as one of the ablest efforts I ever heard from Mr. Lincoln at the bar. His illustrations were apt and forcible, his statements clear and logical, and his reasons in favor of the policy (and necessarily the right) to bridge the river, and thereby encourage the settlement and building up of the vast area of fertile country to the west of it, were broad and statesmanlike.

"The pith of his argument was in his statement that one man had as good a right to cross a river as another had to sail up or down it ; that these were equal and mutual rights which must be exercised so as not to interfere with each other, like the right to cross a street or highway and the right to pass along it. From this undeniable right to cross the river he then proceeded to discuss the means for crossing. Must it always be by canoe or ferryboat ? Must the products of all the boundless fertile country lying west of the river for all time be compelled to stop on its western bank, be unloaded from the cars and loaded upon a boat, and after the transit across the river, be reloaded into cars on the other side, to continue on their journey east?

“In this connection he drew a vivid picture of the future of the great west lying beyond the river, and argued that the necessities of commerce demanded that the bridges across the river be a conceded right, which the steamboat interests ought not to be allowed to successfully resist, and thereby stay the progress of development and civilization in the region to the west.

“While I cannot recall a word or sentence of the argument, I well remember its effect on all who listened to it, and the decision of the court fully sustained the right to bridge so long as it did not unnecessarily obstruct navigation.”

Lincoln's argument covered the channel of the river, its currents and their effect at the different stages of water at the bridge and up over the rapids. In illustrating his points, Lincoln used a very fine miniature steamboat.

A few incidents relating to the river at the point where this bridge crossed are of interest in connection with Lincoln's plea.

In the summer of 1837, the United States government ordered a survey of the Rock river rapids in the Mississippi river, at the foot of which was afterward built the bridge involved in the law suit. December 6th, 1837, the lieutenant of engineers, to whom had been assigned the duty, made an exhaustive report, accompanying the same with a map of the river from the lower end (the foot of Rock Island) to the upper end of the rapids.

In his argument to the jury, Lincoln necessarily used all of the government surveys and maps, as well as all other data available and undoubtedly possessed himself of the information given in the report and map made by the engineer's corps. This same United States engineer, who had been commissioned a lieutenant in 1837, made other plans that gave to the then President Lincoln, much concern and trouble in the years from 1861 to

1865. The United States lieutenant of engineers of 1837—Robert E. Lee—later became general in command of the confederate army.

When Lincoln was endeavoring to convince the jury that the bridge was neither an object of danger, nor an obstruction to the navigation of the Mississippi river, he might have called as a witness another person who was also in after years to become a powerful factor in shaping Lincoln's destiny.

In September, 1832, the Sac war chief, Black Hawk, whom Abraham Lincoln as a soldier boy tried to help capture, became a prisoner of war at Prairie du Chien, was placed on board a steamboat to be taken to Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. Upon the boat's arrival at the fort, it was learned that cholera was raging there, and the United States lieutenant in charge of the boat was not permitted to land. He anchored his boat in the river opposite the fort, but a few hundred feet above where the bridge was afterward built. Had this young lieutenant been called, he might have given valuable testimony concerning the current of the river at this point. During the civil war this young lieutenant, Jefferson Davis, became president of the confederate states.

LINCOLN AND THE MONITOR.

Lincoln's election to the presidency, the breaking out of the civil war and its sanguinary prolongation absorbed the entire interests of the country and of congress and gave to Lincoln neither the time nor opportunity to promote the project of the development of our waterways. As commander-in-chief of our army and navy, Lincoln was brought closely and largely in contact with military matters, and there is no reason to doubt that his experience as a captain and private in the Black Hawk war was of much benefit to him.

Lincoln had never been on an ocean-going vessel, his knowledge of boating being confined solely to craft that navigated our inland waters. Yet there is one incident in his connection with our navy in which his decision, I think, was aided largely by his early experience on our western waterways.

In the spring of 1861 during our civil war, the confederates took possession of the steamer Merrimac, which they found in Norfolk harbor, and converted her into a formidable iron-clad vessel, re-naming her the Virginia. This boat destroyed the frigates Cumberland and Congress, and for a while all of our shipping seemed at the mercy of this rebel boat. One Captain John Ericsson had the plans of a boat which he wanted our government to build. Experts to whom the project was submitted regarded it as a very doubtful experiment. President Lincoln, on being shown the model, believed the boat if built would be able to successfully overcome the Merrimac and would be a valuable addition to our navy.

Captain Fox, the adviser of Captain Ericsson, once expressed a doubt as to the Monitor's success upon which the president said:

"I believe in the Monitor and her commander. If Captain Worden does not give a good account of the Monitor and of himself, I shall have made a mistake in following my judgment for the first time. Since I have been here, captain, I have not made a mistake in following my clear judgment of men since this war began. I followed that judgment when I gave Worden the command of the Monitor. I would make the appointment over again today."

The Monitor was built, and afterward while the boat was on her way from New York to Hampton Roads, Captain Fox again presented what he considered the possibilities of failure. The president replied:"

"No, no, captain, I respect your judgment, as you have reason to know, but this time you are all wrong.

The Monitor was one of my inspirations; I believed in her firmly when that energetic contractor first showed me Ericsson's plans. Captain Ericsson's plain but rather enthusiastic demonstration made my conversion permanent. It was called a floating battery then; I called it a raft. I caught some of the inventor's enthusiasm and it has been growing upon me. I thought then, and I am confident now, it is just what we want. I am sure that the Monitor is still afloat and that she will yet give a good account of herself. Sometimes I think she may be the veritable sling with a stone that will yet smite the Merrimac Philistine in the forehead."

The president's judgment was verified, for the fight of the Monitor and Merrimac changed all the conditions of naval warfare. Captain Fox afterward said: "I know all the facts which united to give us the Monitor. I withhold no credit from Captain Ericsson, her inventor, but I know that the country is principally indebted for the construction of the vessel to President Lincoln."

There can be no doubt that in forming his estimate of the Monitor's capabilities, Lincoln was guided largely by his experience as a boat builder, pilot and navigator upon our western rivers.

Most of Lincoln's early life was interwoven with the pioneer history of our rivers and their commerce. Much of his knowledge was obtained from travel thereon and observation thereof, and as has been well said by one of his biographers:

"All that Abraham Lincoln saw of men and the world outside of Gentryville and its neighborhood, until after he was twenty-one years of age, he saw on these rivers."

His legislative experience had been of great benefit to him. There he had always favored the policy of developing the rivers and the resources of the state by the fostering aid of the local government. His speech in congress shows he understood the waterway problem,

was fully alive to its interests and realized its needs. Had he lived longer there is no doubt our rivers and harbors would have found in him a worthy champion."

It was as a youth, while engaged on the river in the humble capacity of a flatboat man, that he was brought face to face with the slave question, and it was then that he formed those opinions which in after years became such a potent factor in shaping his life and the destiny of our country.

